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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002369

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [TH](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER DISPUTE: WEEKEND PROTESTS
THREATEN TO INFLAME TENSIONS

Classified By: Political Counselor George P. Kent, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Yellow-shirt supporters plan a September 19 protest in the vicinity of Preah Vihear temple to demand that Cambodia civilians vacate the disputed territory adjacent to the temple. The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) claims that the Thai government has surrendered sovereignty by permitting the continued presence of the Cambodian settlements in the disputed area. A plan by opposition red-shirted locals to counter the yellow protest could complicate the border situation, and Thai government and military officials have expressed concern that a clash between the sides could spark renewed conflict with Cambodia.

Thai Army Second Area Commander LTG Wiboonsak Neeparn has ordered troops to maintain peace in the area; military road blocks went up mid-day September 17 on roads leading to the disputed area, and Thai police are mobilizing to assist.

¶2. (C) Comment: While Thai-Cambodian tensions have eased following Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban's visit to Phnom Penh in late June, the PAD protest and potential red counter-protest could put the Abhisit Vejjajiva government in a difficult place. The yellow and red plans for September 19 could inflame tensions if the protests were to spiral out of control or if they spill into the disputed area, though Thai authorities are already deploying in force several days in advance. While Thai media had initially focused on planned red demonstrations September 19 in Bangkok as the latest challenge to the Abhisit government, the protests the same day near Preah Vihear, depending on the number of protesters and the willingness and ability of security forces to keep the situation under control, could be more problematic. The protests could also threaten to complicate efforts to peacefully resolve the border dispute, a repeat of the 2008 dynamic in which domestic dynamics affected cross-border relations.

¶3. (C) Comment, cont: The PAD's actions this week once again expose the multi-faceted, pluralistic nature of Thai politics. The PAD movement has been motivated by anti-Thaksin sentiment, but a wide divide remains between the PAD and the Democrats, who came to power late last year on the heels of Thaksin-loyalists falling from power. A renegade faction of the pro-Thaksin spectrum joined the Democrat coalition as the Phumjai Thai party and deployed its own "blue shirts" at various times in 2009; reports coming from Sisaket province September 17 indicate the blue-shirts may also join the border mix September 19. Renewed PAD

activism would further complicate Abhisit's attempts to govern domestically and to pursue a rational foreign policy.
End Summary and Comment.

YELLOW PROTESTERS TO DEMAND CAMBODIA VACATE DISPUTED AREA

¶4. (SBU) A planned September 19 People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) protest on the Thai side of the disputed border near Preah Vihear temple looks to further complicate relations with Cambodia and potentially could lead to conflict with "reds," who reportedly are planning to try to block the protest. Yellow-shirt PAD protesters plan to march to an area near Preah Vihear to demand that Cambodians leave the disputed area; media reports indicate they will also demand that the temple be returned to Thailand. The yellow protest would coincide with a red-shirt rally of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) in Bangkok intended to mark three years since the September 19, 2006 coup that removed Thaksin Shinawatra from office. Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban was quoted September 15 by the Bangkok Post as saying that the PAD protest may exacerbate the border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia at a time when tensions between the two governments had eased. Suthep called for caution by the protesters and endorsed the Thailand-Cambodia Joint Border Commission (JBC) as the proper mechanism for resolving ownership of 4.6 square kilometers of disputed territory adjacent to Preah Vihear.

¶5. (C) PAD leader Veera Somkwamkid told us September 16 that PAD supporters would protest in the area of Preah Vihear

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September 19 to demand the removal of Cambodian civilians and buildings from the disputed overlapping claims area before the two countries start negotiating border demarcation. Veera alleged that Thailand had already ceded sovereignty over the disputed area, because both the Thai government and military had failed to prevent Cambodians from settling in the area and building residences. (Note: The Thai government has claimed publicly and privately that Cambodian settlements in the area violate a 2000 bilateral MOU that prohibited the two sides from changing the status quo in disputed border areas. End note.) Veera claimed the RTG had tried to cover up the issue by sending Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya to the border area September 13. Veera cited Section 70 and 71 of the Thai Constitution, which call upon Thai citizens to uphold the nation, religion, the King and the democratic regime (Section 70) and to defend the country and protect national interests (Section 71), as the basis for the protests.

¶6. (C) Veera told us PAD supporters would gather around Thailand's Khao Phra Viharn (Preah Vihear) National Park and try to march to Pha Mo I Daeng hill. Veera estimated that 10,000 supporters would join the march, primarily from central and northeastern provinces. Local officials from Kantharalak district in Sisaket Province told us September 16 that less than one hundred PAD supporters had gathered at the national park in advance of the protest. The provincial authorities had received instructions to closely monitor PAD movements but not to prepare measures to disperse the protesters. However, army officials plan to prevent the march into the disputed area (see below, para 10).

¶7. (C) Pha Mo I Daeng, from reading Embassy maps, is located to the northeast of Preah Vihear temple, in undisputed Thai territory, outside the overlapping claims area. Security officials are worried that this weekend's protest could result in a situation similar to a rally in July 2008, when three PAD supporters were arrested by Cambodian authorities after entering disputed territory. That event was among the factors that led to heightened Thai-Cambodian tensions.

¶8. (C) Foreign Minister Kasit visited the area near Preah Vihear September 13 to survey the situation and to meet local

Cambodia officials. Kasit was reported to have made the trip to both to lay the groundwork for progress during a meeting with the Cambodian Foreign Minister in New York at the upcoming UN General Assembly and to protect the Democrat Party from accusations by the PAD that the government had neglected the border situation and thereby ceded territory to Cambodia.

REDS PLAN COUNTER-PROTEST - SECURITY FORCES REACTING

¶9. (C) In a move that would likely complicate the planned protest, local villagers who are red-shirt supporters were mobilizing in Sisaket Province to confront the planned PAD protest, according to Sunai Phasuk, a contact with good connections to security officials and both the yellow and red political movements. The crucial question this weekend, according to Sunai, would be whether the police and army would be willing and able to help control the situation. Sunai supplied jpeg photos late September 17 showing the army had set up razor-wire road-blocks on the roads leading to the disputed site to prevent access.

¶10. (C) Thai Army Second Area Commander LTG Wiboonsak Neeparn confirmed to us September 17 that he had ordered troops in the area to maintain peace and order and to prevent the yellow and red protesters from clashing. Wiboonsak said that protesters would be kept from marching to Pha Mo I Daeng due to security concerns and insufficient facilities at the hill to accommodate the protesters. Pha Mo I Daeng would be a dangerous location for a PAD camp as it was in the direct line of fire of Cambodian artillery if conflict broke out between Thailand and Cambodia.

¶11. (C) Wiboonsak expressed grave concern over the developing situation, stating that Cambodia had positioned heavy artillery and equipment in the area; demonstrations in the

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area could aggravate the volatile situation. As such, the planned protest and counter-protest would have to be kept under control. Wiboonsak doubted Veera's claim regarding expectations of the number of PAD protesters. He expected the total number of protesters from the two sides to number no more than 2,000 people.

¶12. (SBU) Thai media reported September 17 that two hundred police would be deployed to the Preah Vihear area to help control PAD demonstrators. Region 3 Commander Police Lt. Gen. Krisda Phankongchuen said police would work with the Thai military stationed in the area to keep the demonstrators from entering disputed land. Police were ordered not to carry weapons and prohibited from using force to deal with the yellow-shirts.

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